

What is claimed is:

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1. A method of establishing communications comprising:
establishing a virtual connection between a source
endpoint located behind a first connectivity barrier and a
5 destination endpoint located behind a second connectivity
barrier.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein at least one of the
connectivity barriers comprises a firewall.

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3. The method of claim 1 wherein at least one of the
connectivity barriers comprises a consumer gateway.

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4. The method of claim 1 wherein establishing a virtual
connection includes:

establishing a first session between the source
endpoint and a service; and

establishing a second session between the destination
endpoint and the service.

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5. The method of claim 4 including assigning one or more
servers associated with the service to handle the sessions.

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6. The method of claim 1 in which the virtual connection
is established based on a virtual host name associated with
the source endpoint.

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7. The method of claim 6 wherein the virtual host name comprises part of a hierarchical naming system.

8. The method of claim 6 including providing a directory
5 search application to allow a user to select the virtual host name.

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9. The method of claim 6 wherein the source endpoint is capable of roaming between networks.

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10. The method of claim 4 including dynamically assigning at least one server associated with the service to handle the sessions.

15 11. A method of establishing communications between source and destination endpoints comprising:

establishing a session between the source endpoint located behind a connectivity barrier and a service; and

establishing a transport level communications
20 connection between the service and the destination endpoint.

12. The method of claim 11 wherein the barrier comprises a firewall.

25 13. The method of claim 11 wherein the barrier comprises a consumer gateway.

14. The method of claim 11 including assigning a server associated with the service to handle the session.

15. The method of claim 11 in which the session is established based on a virtual host name associated with the source endpoint.

16. The method of claim 15 wherein the virtual host name comprises part of hierarchical naming system.

17. The method of claim 15 including providing a directory search application to allow a user to select the virtual host name.

18. The method of claim 15 wherein the source endpoint is capable of roaming between networks.

19. The method of claim 14 wherein the server is dynamically assigned.

20. A system comprising:

a service arranged to respond to a request from a first endpoint to establish communications with a second endpoint, wherein, if the second endpoint is located behind a

connectivity barrier, a session initiated by the second endpoint is established with the service, and if the second endpoint is not located behind a connectivity barrier, a

transport level communications connection is established with the second endpoint.

21. The system of claim 20 wherein the connectivity barrier
5 comprises a firewall.

22. The system of claim 20 wherein the connectivity barrier
comprises a consumer gateway.

23. The system of claim 20 wherein the service is arranged
10 to assign a server to handle the session between the first
endpoint and the service based on a virtual host name
associated with the first endpoint.

24. The system of claim 23 wherein the virtual host name
15 comprises part of hierarchical naming system.

25. The system of claim 20 wherein the service is arranged
to assign a server to handle the session between the first
20 endpoint and the service dynamically.

26. An article comprising a computer-readable medium
including computer-executable instructions for causing a
computer system, in response to a request from a first
25 endpoint located behind a first connectivity barrier to
establish connectivity to a second endpoint, to:

assign a server to handle a session between the first endpoint and a service; and

5 establish a session initiated by the second endpoint if the second endpoint is located behind a second connectivity barrier.

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27. The article of claim 26 including instructions for causing the computer system to establish a transport level communications connection to the second endpoint if the
10 second endpoint is not located behind a connectivity barrier.

28. The article of claim 26 including instructions for causing the computer system to instruct the first endpoint
15 to establish a direct session with the second endpoint if the second endpoint is not located behind a connectivity barrier.

29. The article of claim 26 including instructions for
20 causing the computer system to establish the session between the first endpoint and the service based on a virtual host name associated with the first endpoint.

30. The article of claim 29 wherein the virtual host name
25 comprises part of hierarchical naming system.